





# DIE LEERE MITTE

*Random Access Journal*

B E R L I N

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.....

```
#include <stdio.h>
int main()
{
    printf("Hello, Berlin!");
    return 0;
}
```



DIE LEERE MITTE  
*Guidelines*

**Broadly accepted:** Experimental and conceptual writing, theoretical papers, asemic and concrete texts, vispo, theorems, axiom collection, quantum weirdness, reviews of books addressing these topics and the like.

**Texts:** poetry (60 lines max. overall); prose (500-600 words max. overall). *Format:* Times New Roman 12; single line spacing; all in one .doc or .odt file. *Languages:* Catalan, Croatian, English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish.

**Visual:** 1-3 B&W images. *Format:* jpg, tiff, png, 72-300 DPI.

Simultaneous submissions are welcome, provided that the piece is withdrawn if accepted elsewhere, as well as previously published works when properly credited. Each issue will be free to download (.pdf). A printed version will be made available through KDP/lulu for collectors. No reading fee; no payment or copies to contributors at present. Authors assume responsibility for the originality, intellectual property rights and ethical implications of submitted works.

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Werner Preuß · *collage*, 2022



Patrick Sweeney · *short form*

This mosquito... probably a back-up singer

who am I (at age 8, in my 9th year) to feel sorry for  
Frank Sinatra Jr.

(LET THIS ONE GO) he ate the complimentary, subdermal,  
cheesecake at Vesuvio's

Shaky takes the walk-ins, and an occasional bloody ear

a tinsel stream running down the side of the bunched-up carpet

he was an ugly philosopher  
going around spreading lies  
about nothingness

(long distance)  
even then he was asking  
the color of the sky

I'm not going to spend another minute of my life  
waiting for the governor  
to call

meeting an 'exposed to A-bomb in the womb person'  
we simultaneously bow  
and shake hands

His unity of all beings before Her coffee

thank you for sharing your Jisei with us  
we'd love to see more of such work  
in your next incarnation

adding near-Earth objects to my existential threats

(his thinking aloud)  
about the body and blood of Christ  
altered the amplitude of the polite gathering

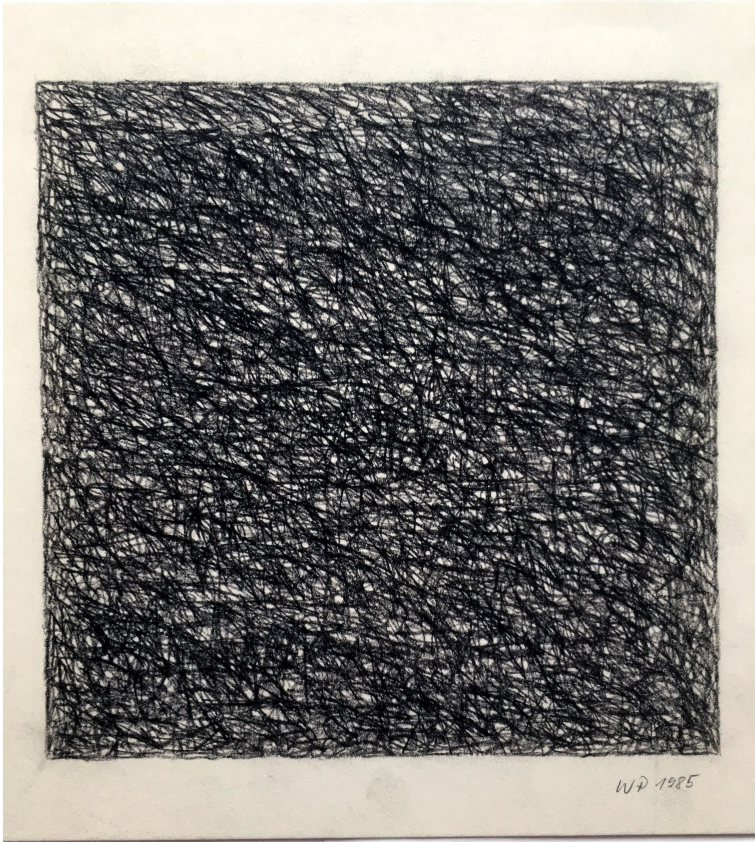
a note: we're told we don't have to put up with your  
peculiarities anymore

I want my angel to smell like stale beer  
liverwurst & onion  
on rye

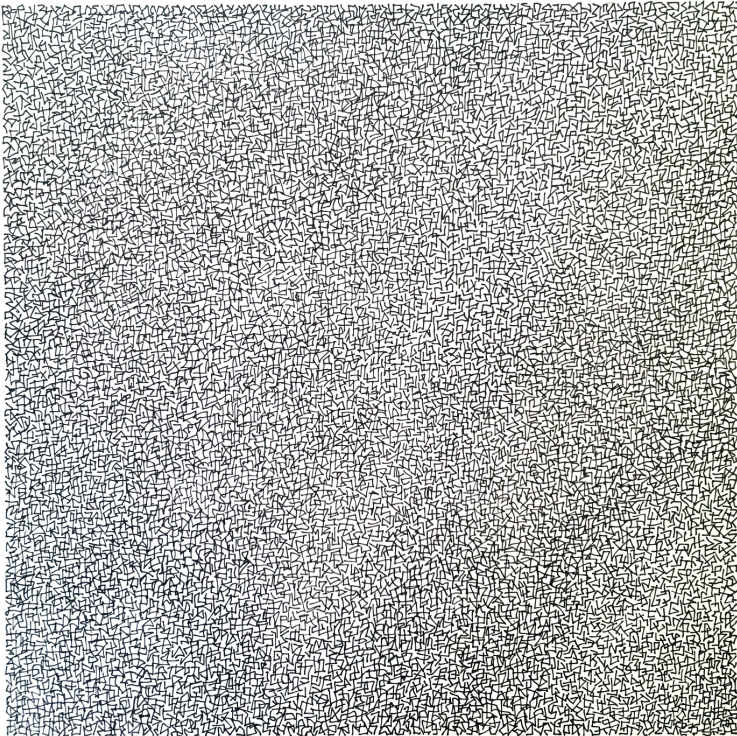
Werner Preuß · *collage*, 2022



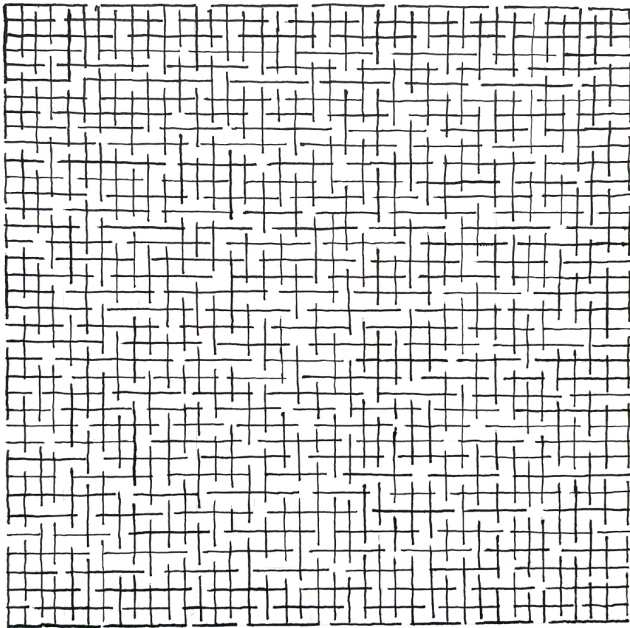
*grease pencil, 1985*



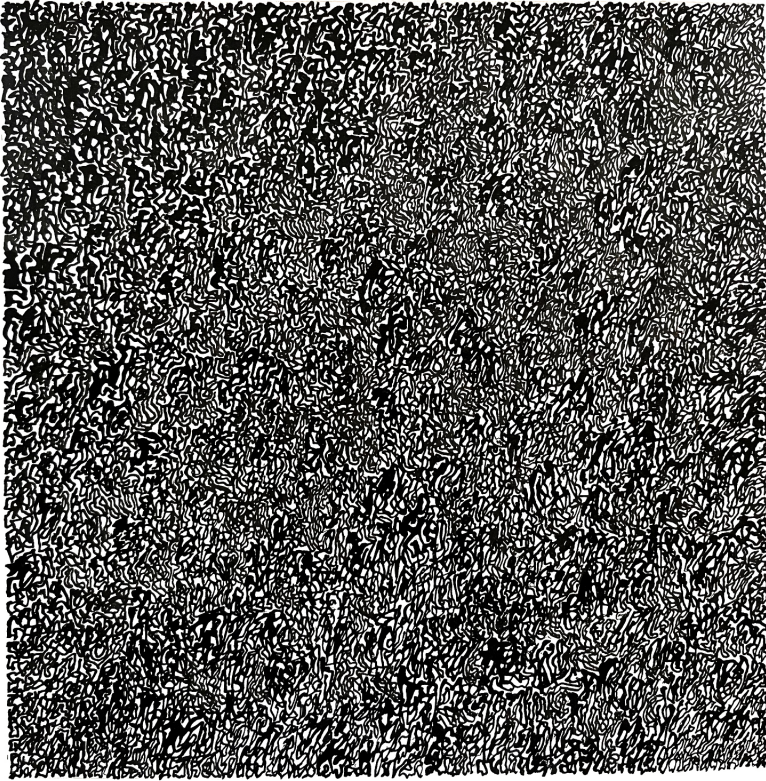
*pen, ink, 2024*



*pen, ink, 2024*



*pen, ink, 2024*



Upon the spinal-hot altar at last  
he settled his hands unwoven in glass

perplexed-atop his cold chest to narrate  
the moist-bite of Mouth's leathered cleanse.

*"Scoop out your Dreamage!"* his Oracles cried,  
grateful for the crushing of their previousness.

*"Be blown within out! Accept blessèd Witherdness!  
Praise none but prowled foxes of vaporous Lust!"*

False up the trees now black-wolfed deliriants,  
he replied in the stillsome night, "Capture me,

O Capture—but briefly! Withdraw my fingers  
form the Circle Flight's path to press your

internals against Folly's rictal Delights!"  
And That (within all that) was That.

*Performance*

The knowing  
generous man  
in a brown suit  
smiles/looks up  
pulls eyelids back  
lowers orbs to white  
vibrates to wild acclaim  
of pigeons and lamp posts  
skips away skips away skips.

*Chilblainesque*

Nippling the retirement of snow's  
ghost radio/the question of the cello  
must lack the laugh or muffle it  
just long enough for us to ponder  
rain thoughts of the withered  
raising exhumation points  
within the thumb-vagina's  
careful handling of the mutes  
and thank the broken ceiling for  
scooping holy ashes with the corner  
of a postcard sold only to wayward vines.

Lucien Levant · *Last Words No. 16 (The Summer Fling)*

At seventeen, and lemonade,  
you need the promenade.  
June nights, your eyes is near, and beer...  
A branch, dark blue that fades, and white...  
it in your head.

A kiss, living thing, thousand  
novels, walks alluringly.  
Ominous shadow, starched collar, boot-heels  
tapping, eyes wide to resist your lips till  
August.  
Her laugh —  
bad news, beloved, writes blinding.  
Cafes or lemonade  
at seventeen, the promenade.

*Erasure of "Novel" by Arthur Rimbaud using the last two words on each line.*

*Last Words No. 22 (Returning After the Battle of Normandy)*

And red-colored hosts threaded headland,  
the flight slower.  
Shuttles of death should than all-teeming loom.  
Self-conscious history, its action a pastime.  
Long-sleeved ladies, lords, abandoned of Normandy.

Opposite coast at home, and hautbois,  
expensive threads, windless afternoon.  
There too, knots came:  
mind's attention, keen remembrance:  
long beach,  
a void for speech.

*Erasure of "Mathilde in Normandy" by Adreinne C. Rich using the last two words on each line.*

*Last Words No. 26 (Air Strike in the Trenches)*

We heard the sky, the plow:  
our face, surely now:  
Most High Shining Word of Grace.

The fair, fairest daughter: the fire.  
This day, the pyre:  
evil quarter in air; stones away.

And night, voice spoke empty again,  
nothingness above stricken men  
who awoke, known aright: surely Love.

*Erasure of "Chorus for Our Play" by David Morton using the last two words on each line.*

*Last Words No. 33 (Young Women Travelling Abroad)*

Phantom bark, speak again: the lark,  
the main funnel smoke winds again.  
But stoke in vain thy sails,  
cold stream of males or rain.

To me, final friends — for me, were they?  
My faith ever away; dawn lilies,  
railroad ties the train.

Cattle country, jokes, roses,  
furbished room.  
Right kindness were counters and schedules.  
The Indies' love forever those far.

The stag fox's brush, hill's crag,  
either side certain mirth.  
Dionysus said my resignation  
when all spring unlaced the fathers.

*Erasure of "Phantom Bark", "A Postscript", and "Enrich My Resignation" by  
Hart Crane using the last two words on each line*

Glenn Bach · from *Atlas*

What direction  
for this coveted downtown *Linden and Broadway* of  
course or the buildings that survive

our deference to fire. Our fear of peace

read [silence | silence! at twilight in late summer  
hale esp. in the phrase (archaic)

*join me in the autumn.* But time itself  
home] a lean: the fewer blind spots we will  
have

*loaded with luxury a relaxed urban lifestyle*

from a rough port. On a prime  
of new layers deposited

under the trees no clouds  
but smog. Will break  
always there

under the trees. No clouds  
in a vexed sky  
of particulates. Will breach

even the cleanest air  
on earth. Like the wrinkles

thought to be  
a mountain

the following  
high lights.

two chest in of fire  
bone soldier have the  
diamond  
I am  
consumed day?  
old? you?

a purse burning on  
your want loud again.  
water faces. hot are like  
reads it gold  
the p eb bb bbl bl es ground

tongue, mountain  
thousands shore  
made easily. poems crushed  
bed. Joshua salt wherewater who

water, sits huge. All live  
there flood, what came on  
of desert of moon of mooooooon.

the loved before  
free to endless  
killing  
wise or thin. Clouds  
or full sun

Sandcherry. How to bring a burst.

This is not as it seems so simple a question.

Without the correct pollinator nearby.

Without milkweed there can be no monarchs.

After the danger of frost has passed. To cast many  
fine seeds to the wind. Through cold stratification.

To see what method is required. In fence rows.

On roadsides. In fields and pastures and prairies.

There is no plum of the rough and the cocklebur  
has no spines. Being buoyant the bur disperses.

Becoming entangled.

Forests pine, these  
gleaming hundreds, Ocean  
or two Pacific than in the west  
somber, bright  
our first foothills, behold  
the vast, the sea billowy

enchanted dense or white-  
blossomed  
evergreen snow (down  
irregular banks, oaks  
chaparral (patches of

rich valley dark. River  
soil, if clay-rich grain)  
Sacramento level with plains  
world-renowned. Matchless  
its traversed ripening

looking  
to account for every single  
item in a city

join the fertile  
one and with them  
the plain). Hurries  
in thousands

then fields, threads  
gleaming, shadowy depths  
across streams this emerging  
wind by the foothills  
the silver, the way.



*Rubrik*



A year of in-betweens  
in a vibrant life  
now resembling an ER waiting room—  
people-packed in varying states of anguish.  
Those wheelchair-bound, abandoned in halls,  
those bedridden, speaking in groans  
and the many—  
sitting, standing seemingly unfazed,  
but to an extent all commonly feeling pain,  
a need for a doctor we don't see,  
a need for the aches to be eased,  
but malnourished on stretchers—  
Our only medics.

Beeps, screams.  
Whines, cries.  
Rushing feet,  
panicked eyes  
and another flatline  
to collectively ring in every ear.

Heave—  
heave—  
heave—  
Wait— and breathe,  
wait— and breathe.  
I squeeze the sweat-soaked sheets,  
as my soul strains through me by the second,  
deflating my being like a liferaft with a leak,  
leaving me stagnant in a drowning situation calling for patience.  
Patience, while feeling a cast iron rod pierce through my heart,  
clog my throat,  
prod my brain.  
Patience, while plowing through another day  
by the grace of a caffeine-powered body.  
By the mercy of a mind hoping tomorrow  
might rebirth a fallen yesteryear  
to remind me—  
I'm of worth.

At last, doctor calls my name,  
fires questions out the mouth like a Mossberg 500

and rushes away for another four months,  
leaving more holes in a leaking plot needing to be filled.  
No surgery nor novocaine  
just more stagnance in a room  
where spinning ceiling fans are the only movement seen—  
the sole motion  
spreading around everyone's disease.

Am I far off somewhere?  
Daydreaming in a car stuck in a roundabout,  
having a bad trip in a brighter year,  
or am I really trapped in an unending day?  
An ER kept alive by insomnia  
and a newly discovered inability  
to walk through chaotic hallways—  
'cause never failing to freeze  
are two legs  
locking me  
between entrance and exit—  
stranding me  
in a smothering embrace.

Samuel Goldsmith · *The Bull is the Only Real Thing in this Poem*

to seal                      still                      able                      with  
                                         a bull  
                                         syllables  
                                         the red  
                                         masks  
                                         that which  
                                         you wish  
to                      avoid                      with  
                                         a                      pause  
                                         a                      flourish  
                                         a                      pplause  
                                         then  
roar-sound  
to                      fill                      a                      void  
                                         sonic  
rorschach                      that  
unmasks                      your skull  
                                         earth turns                      in  
                                         rotation  
past  
standing                      ovation  
                                         conquest                      the                      your  
                                         still-                      able bull  
                                         is still                      a bull                      with  
a past  
                                         iteration

what the men put their backs into  
pulling from the sea

out into the sun  
must remain

unseen  
as if

still in  
the water drawn from so

we continue  
to watch and see

*3 Gouache Paintings by Fikret Muallá (c. 1954 – 1957)*

*Two Customers Chatting*

one is called a customer  
but for how long

and how long ago

chatting with mouths  
as quiet

as mou  
staches

*Still Life with Two Faces*

Ah the still    life still

a life replete    with a basket of fruit

in one corner    still with life

*Woman with a Basket*

one need only  
to come to

the foreground

of passing  
by

*M. Marey's Photographs of a Falling Cat, 1894*

the eightfold path  
of right thinking  
acting and

being a matter  
of folding  
in and un

folding in  
righting one

self as one falls

the right way  
down into this

moment's  
momentum

>Algonquin satellite district cavities<,  
plural absence & conflicting disorder:  
[always STANDS as a ZeBrA NeckBrAce]=/  
dynamism, chattering, waist, parody of guarantees=>  
=> => :  
CHURN-CHURN-CHURN => =>  
lethal dollars, sniffing desirable results  
folding infested fields of distorted dialogues, !, [,  
passions / changes / sniffing /  
dawning (incarnate), a changeling  
hOOp IN FORM=  
lESs  
attention SPANS] = implied  
tesTING apparatus exiles KicK

*now comes the threaded window blimps*

] = = = reloaded & unevenly sullen  
cups / re=TOUCH=ed = ) (,  
an unvarnished template:  
    an airplane ravages  
    hunks of mosquito  
    sidewalks [narrow,  
                morrow,  
                limping crypts];,  
, ????? > ease of thumping lozenges  
    clash avenues < SuBwAy  
        BOUND  
        aftershave  
        sandwiches  
        warped & numbed

*rolled like a cooling system*

| porkpie deer hoof meandering chasms  
delay edges, specialized transoms, bask  
missions . . . spaghetti grass gnomonic arts  
festivities shuttering blindly avuncular | :  
    . . . [white MiSt of radioactive particles  
        blundering, crashing, solid as a  
        smoking radish eel] => => =>  
    ornithological ennui on coastal kindergartens,  
overall : morphine : STRAW-TO-SOUP-RATIO:  
    NoT wHaT lUrKs  
    without tenement  
    prunes battling  
    preparatory outlook  
    variations

*empty couch phases*

sundown  
snooze , a tunic lightbulb  
that SQUEAKS in withering  
pubic hair bananas . . .  
    > | solid grotesquerie  
        honking marbleized  
        hula-hoop districts | <  
‘is it a plan or rattling thimbles?’  
    . . . moderate tUbeS oozing  
        doughy reservoirs,  
        applauding ordeals,  
futuristic & slippery as a pyramid  
chasing snowy barrels of oil:  
        daily mermaid sink  
    > ! < , inadvertent grocery list  
        long forgotten

Bob Lucky · *I Killed Some Time This Afternoon*

Paintings all askew  
frame life off kilter.

Dusty blinds mangle  
what's left of daylight.

Music crackles through  
thickening silence

and notebooks litter  
the floor with ideas.

There's blood everywhere.  
Pomegranates are like that.

## *On Prepositions*

on top  
on point  
on time  
on course  
on target  
on track  
on foot  
on board  
on leave  
on strike  
on principle  
on purpose  
on average  
on paper  
on file  
on fire  
on edge  
and on  
and on  
and so on

*See What I Mean: Excerpts from The Dictionary of My First Marriage*

|                      |                                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Beach</b>         | See SAND; FRICTION BURN         |
| <b>Beer</b>          | See JUDGMENT INHIBITOR          |
| <b>Best Man</b>      | See ASSHOLE                     |
| <b>Hangover</b>      | See RUM                         |
| <b>Honeymoon</b>     | See DIVORCE                     |
| <b>Maid of Honor</b> | See SEX                         |
| <b>Mother-in-Law</b> | See WEDDING                     |
| <b>Oysters</b>       | See APHRODISIAC; FOOD POISONING |
| <b>Sex</b>           | See MAID OF HONOR               |
| <b>Summer</b>        | See MOSQUITOS                   |
| <b>Sun</b>           | See SKIN CANCER; SUN BURN       |
| <b>Toast</b>         | See COMPENDIUM OF CLICHÉS       |
| <b>Wedding</b>       | See CIRCUS; MOTHER-IN-LAW       |
| <b>Wedding Cake</b>  | See METAPHOR, EXPENSIVE         |

With summer approaching, the Parks and Recreation Department would like to remind parents that unsupervised children who cannot swim can sink.

An 89-year-old widow, convinced Death had stood her up, jumped out a ground floor window and broke her hip.

A family that disappeared a decade ago has been found working as clowns in a circus. Investigators say make-up and masks impeded their investigation.

A new religion is seeking adherents. Auditions will be held at the town hall this Saturday. No one should levitate until asked to do so.

The Lost & Found office at the train station has been closed since Tuesday. Staff locked inside report there are enough lunch boxes to last two more days.

The blind seer known as Heriberto has regained his sight. His followers will meet at The Diner for breakfast tomorrow at 8:00 to discuss this unfortunate miracle.

Roger Pope was born in 1938 in Rutherford, New Jersey, the son of a wealthy businessman and homemaker. Growing up, his family physician was the poet William Carlos Williams, whom the artist credits as an early and abiding influence. "The coming and going from his office," Pope told an interviewer in 1972, "the passing scenery... derelict buildings and banal suburban homes, and this great man living unimpeded in the middle of it, continuing to work, was really inspiring."<sup>1</sup>

Pope studied at the Art Students League from 1954 to 1956; his earliest exhibited work had a distinctly Pop Art / Neo Dada aesthetic, collaging popular imagery from science fiction films and homoerotic 'beefcake' magazines with abstract, gestural brushwork.<sup>2</sup>

After the death of his father in 1964, Pope took a four-year break from artmaking. "I needed to find some way to distance myself from my surroundings," Pope told *Artforum* in 1972. "I had been raised in this capitalist, production-presentation ethos, which left me feeling like an imposter."<sup>3</sup>

The artist found creative rejuvenation in his hometown. After a brief period of study at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, he returned to Rutherford, where he began to stage the first of what he liked to call 'interventions' in various industrial spaces. Inspired by the writings of J.G. Ballard and early childhood memories, these interventions included the installation of several crystalline structures using natural and found materials.

Of these, *ONYX* is probably Pope's most famous intervention, due to its frequent photographic reproduction. It consisted of a giant stone statue, akin to ones on Easter Island, photographed in a condemned home as it was being demolished. The piece became famous – or infamous, depending on who you ask – when its documentation, along with the documentation of several other interventions,<sup>4</sup> was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1972.

---

1 Grau la Grau. "Pope of All He Surveys," *Artforum* (July 1972).

2 Some examples of this early style include *FEAR OF FLYING* (1955) and *THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL* (1956) which can be found in the Museum of Modern Art permanent collection.

3 Grau la Grau. "Pope of All He Surveys," *Artforum* (July 1972).

4 Other interventions included in Pope's Biennial exhibition include *THE INVERSE VERSION* (documentation in private collection) and *THREE VIEWS OF THE GODDESS ATHENA IN THE POTOMAC* (documentation held by Whitney Museum).

\*\*\*

- You once said that art which is conceived for museums is already a relic of the past.
- Mhm.
- Can you explain that further?
- It's a form of paying respect for the dead.
- Like a monument?
- Like objects in a mausoleum, really.
- Like the bric-a-brac they used to leave in Pharaohs' tombs?
- Exactly.
- Why do you think that is? Wouldn't that make the concept of the museum – and, subsequently, the gallery space – irrelevant?
- I'm not sure it would.
- Interesting; tell me more.
- If we see the museum as a null structure, per McLuhan, in which the act of presentation within that space entombs the art, the object, whatever you want to call it, then that's what it is. Null. You can't fight the meaning you subconsciously give a space. If you do understand what you're doing, what happens when you put your art-object into that space, then recognize. Otherwise, it's hypocrisy.
- But you show in museums, don't you? Why openly embrace presenting work that more discerning members of the public are going to read as dead?
- Museums most interestingly pull life and art apart. Now you, as I'm sure most in our audience are aware, are fascinated by the idea of what's 'happening.' Presentness, nowness, as it were, are your stock in trade. So it makes sense you would see the museum as a nullifying structure.
- And you don't?
- I'm more interested in the audience of what's *not* happening, the area between events which could be called 'the gap.' Blank and void regions that no one would ever think to look at.
- Like the paint drying on the walls outside this auditorium?

\*\*\*

*Barry Townstead was born in 1945 in Pittsburgh, the son of a black mother and a white father who abandoned the family. He was raised by his mother and grandmother on The Hill, a working class predominantly black neighborhood. He attributes his penchant for performance to his early years with his grandmother. "We were each other's only audience," he said in an interview in 1970.<sup>1</sup> "We wanted to grab each other's attention and hold onto it for dear life."*

*After graduating with a degree in comparative literature from Temple University, he attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, where he first met Roger Pope, and began developing his peculiar performance style, which the multidisciplinary artist Meredith Mark called "a no man's land between experimental theater and performance art."*

*His most famous "bits" (as the artist likes to refer to them) include WILLIAM TELL, in which audience members were asked to help Townstead recreate the infamous accidental shooting death of Joan Voller by William Burroughs, and JIVE, a combination interactive performance and video in which the artist videotaped his attempts to teach mostly white audiences AAV.*

\*\*\*

- You laugh, but I believe installations of any sort should clear a room, not fill them.
- I'm for clearing out museums as well.
- Yet why do you still present in galleries?
- Because that's the safest way to present what I do, economically and physically speaking.
- Since when did you care about either of those things? I mean, I'm sure here is aware of your performance *WILLIAM TELL* as well as *MATCHBOOK POEMS*?<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Porter, Rikki. "The Stick-Up Artist," *Jet Magazine* (April 1970).

2 *MATCHBOOK POEMS* was a durational 'bit' first performed at Lisson Gallery in 1970. In it Townstead attempted to recite entire passages of Frederick Douglass's autobiographies before a lit match in one hand went out and

- ... I'm not sure where you're going with this.
- In the gallery space you regularly – or, you know, *reputedly* – put your body on the line in the name of your art. What would happen though if you found some other marginal or penumbral zone, like one of those vast spaces along highways or at the edge of cities, outcroppings of supermarkets and shopping centers, lumber yards, discount houses–
- You're monologuing. What's your point?
- What if you took your art beyond the safety of the gallery? Then they would actually be 'happenings' instead of–
- Instead of what?
- Well, the nice way to describe them would be 'experiments,' but really they're really bits, as you like to call them. Show and Tell. 'Look ma, I'm in danger!'
- And slicing a house in half isn't?<sup>1</sup>
- I think what I do is designed to be a disappointment. It *is* Show and Tell! There's no... no sense of *anticipation*, wherein for you the audience is at the edge of their seats, eager to see what happens next.
- And there's something wrong with that? Social compromise?
- Not particularly. Where I have qualms is the stated *intention* of the artist. You say museums and galleries kill art, and they do. When you advertise someone's going to fire a rifle at you though, we know you're not *actually* going to get hurt. No one receives any aesthetic or emotional pleasure from suicide save madmen... and suicides.
- So then how would you describe what you do? Both of us agree that museums and galleries are deadening, and that *sometimes* it might be good to take art out of those spaces. Save only one of us has liquidity to do so.

---

burned him. The piece lasted for a full twenty-four hours; following the conclusion of the performance Townstead was taken to the hospital, where he was treated for second-degree burns.

1 The author is unsure of what Townstead refers to here – Pope's *ONYX* involved the demolition of a house by wrecking a ball. Gordon Matta Clark's *SPLITTING* involved the actual cleaving of a house in two, but that didn't occur until 1974.

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*“I remember first meeting Pope at a party,” Townstead recalled in his 2003 memoir, **MULBERRY STREET**:<sup>1</sup>*

*“We were at some loft on Broome, hosted by this Iranian cat<sup>2</sup> I later died a few years later in their revolution. I was deep into dope at the time, always out of my mind, and didn’t really want to be there. I felt like my presence was a sort of box ticking. There were very few – almost none, really – artists of color in the downtown world, and I always felt the only reason I was let in was because I was half white...*

*So I was sitting around at this party, too stoned to anything but mope, when I saw this sharp looking white dude standing in the corner, looking at the ground. And I’m like, what the fuck is this guy doing? I go over and see he’s this handsome, kind of athletic looking dude in a sport coat and nice slacks. But the funny thing was – he wasn’t wearing any shoes. When I asked what he was doing, he said I should take off my shoes and see if I could feel what he was feeling. High and unbelievably bored, I did. Almost as soon as I put my feet back on the floor.... well, it’s hard to explain. Imagine the feeling of a roller coaster as it makes its first descent. Kind of like that. Every atom in my body was tingling*

*What is it? I asked him.*

*It’s the city, he said.*

*And I guess that’s how Roger Pope and I became friends...”*

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– I know we weren’t going to finish this without one shot at my family! I commend you for your patience.

– Are you going to answer my question?

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1 Townstead, Barry. **MULBERRY STREET**, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003. pgs. 73-74

2 The author is unsure who Townstead refers to here. It’s possible that he’s talking about Javed Ali (1942-1979) who worked as an assistant in Time Magazine’s photography department from 1965-1970. Ali was known to associate with artists in the downtown art scene, but there is no documentation of him having met Townstead or Pope. Also, Ali – who was originally from San Francisco – died there of pancreatic cancer in 1979. He had never been to Iran.

- In a roundabout way... if you'd indulge me.
- It's all I do, it appears....

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*There is much speculation as to the exact nature of Pope and Townstead's relationship. Most in the downtown art scene of the time agree that it was intimate even for the relaxed social standards of the period, with some calling the relationship 'symbiotic' and others 'codependent.'*

*"They were attached at the hip," says Harley Frampton, who attended the Whitney Program with the two, and later became lead singer of the new wave band FRITZ THE CAT. "I felt like Roger was really inspired by Barry's whole vibe. Since his death he's sort of developed this whole rock'n'roll, lone wolf persona, but the truth is he was a really shy, lonely guy."*

*Most agree Pope drew confidence from Townstead's presence. Ezekiel Philips, chief curator MoMA, thinks Townstead should be given credit for guiding Pope toward his later, more acclaimed style. "I definitely think the time they spent together was formative. Pope pushed Barry to really gird his work with strong theoretical underpinnings, and Barry pushed Pope to go out into the world."*

*Accounts differ as to how the relationship fractured. It's clear that the social unrest following the annus mirabilis that was 1968 stoked Townstead's political consciousness, and his desire to make work that addressed current events. "Barry was really looking for ways to escape the downtown bubble he felt he trapped himself in," says painter Shayana Marcus, who along with Townstead founded the artist collective BAO (Black Artists Against Oppression). "He was tired of minimalism, which he thought was a white supremacist movement that glorified aesthetics at the expense of people."*

*Pope also wanted to free his art from the strictures of the gallery / museum space, yet was dismayed by his friend's polemical turn. "I really think Roger was afraid to discuss politics," says Marcus. "Because then he would have had to confront his own privilege."*

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- The categorizing of art into painting, sculpture, etc., is one of the more unfortunate things that's taken place in modern day. You

have this interminable avalanche of categories and divisions. And some people, out of hubris or what have you, are prizing certain categories above others. As though any one person or medium has a monopoly over the truth! This puts museums – to bring it back to the topic of our conversation – in a paralyzed place. But I don't think they want to stay that way. So they... they-they-they make *myths* out of action, you know.... they make *myths* out of excitement. They are making use of their own uselessness.

– Art and utility don't mix?

– I'm not sure if I'm saying that... exactly. I think right now a lot of artists, yourself and I included, are doing this sort of... sort of *burlesque* of fullness. As though one space, one meaning, is more right than any other. And I think, you know, what my practice has been about for the last couple years has been finding the *appropriate* way to fill spaces with process.

– Like a cum sock.

– I'm sorry?

– You know...

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*Ezekiel Philips agrees with Marcus's assessment. "There's an understanding now that Roger's childhood was brutal. His dad was a bully and a bigot and beat his son frequently, suspecting his homosexuality. His initial use of collage was a way to bring the world towards him, rather than be out in the world. That's why those early paintings that stuffy, insular quality one now associates with the latter work of Jasper Johns. It was a private codex of symbols only Roger could decode."*

*"Roger kept a lot of things to himself," Townstead wrote in MULBERRY STREET.<sup>1</sup> "The rest of us were in this constant of flux and becoming. Everything from our ideas of art to how we related to each other was constantly changing, and we wanted to ride the wave instead of fighting it. But Roger wasn't like that. Roger was going to be who he always was; only the manner in which he displayed his art shifted. He was fully formed. Primordial, almost. Like those rocks he drew on\*."*

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1 Townstead, Barry. *MULBERRY STREET*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003. pg. 201

*“I had hoped that after 1968, you know, with gay liberation, and black power, that the two might come to a new understanding,” says Shayana Marcus. “In no way do I want to sound negative about their relationship. If there was jealousy, it was jealousy a lot of people felt. By that time the natural camaraderie between artists that has since been enshrined in historical memory was already beginning to fray. Certain artists were getting richer, more famous, and breathing this rarefied air, while the rest of us, artists who were not straight white men, were struggling to be seen.*

*I didn’t ding Barry for wanting to keep up his association with Roger, but after a while we all found it suspect. Here was this brother who used his proximity to these blue-chip white artists to keep himself in the conversation. More than once when we were alone together, Barry would joke that he was ‘a whore.’ And I would tell him, you know, about Roger. “You’re going to break that damn boy’s heart.” Barry loved Roger, just not in the way that Roger wanted. Roger wanted them to be Tristan and Isolde, while Barry wanted them to be Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Roger wanted them to retreat to nature; Barry wanted them to be bandits.”*

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- Heh. Funny. I think you’ve touched on an interesting area, no pun intended.
- Which is?
- That all art is in some way about trying to find what the *value* of art is.
- ... Sure.
- And this, especially in our current boom-bust cycle—
- Bust... as you can see from almost any neighborhood that isn’t Manhattan —
- Creates a dichotomy of value, no value. Good, bad.
- Social pressure is hard to reconcile with your grand ideas.
- At present, galleries and museums are still the primary agent or market for what we do. Even universities, which are a part of this current patronage system, have their own agendas and social codes. No matter how aware you are of these systems, you still can’t escape the fact that you willingly choose to participate within them.

- Again, you get to escape because you have *the money and social capital to*. Namely, whiteness. Of course you can try to nix good, bad, moral judgements, economic considerations – *because you can afford to*. The fascist engineer doesn't have to think about the bomber plane he makes because he never sees how the soldier uses it. This cult of 'pure' aesthetics, art in the cornfields and parks, away from the corrupt city, is some real Leni Riefenstahl schtick. Yes, my participation in dead spaces robs my art of its 'presentness.' But then again – most of my art regards violence against my body... my *black body*. Does anyone want to be *truly* present for that?
- Then why present it?
- To have a *conversation*. The work itself might be dead, but the emotions it raises in an audience are so alive! It's my life blood. I can't draw on rocks, or make sculptures in abandoned buildings, because who is it for, in the end? It's a conversation between oneself–
- And nature.
- Nature was doing just fine without you, prick.

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*The preceding conversation took place on September 5th, 1972, at a panel at the Whitney Museum called "Why Museums Now?" Roger Pope had won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale a few months before. A diverse group of artists had been invited to participate, but at the last second most dropped out in protest of the Museum's continuing lack of female and PoC artists on exhibition.*

*Townstead, for reasons ambiguous even to those close to him, decided to attend. Shayana Marcus believes it was out of a desire to confront Pope, whom Marcus and others believe had been deified by the art establishment due to his apolitical views. "I think Barry wanted to use the opportunity to turn the panel into one his bits. This confrontation between the two great artists on opposite sides of the divide, while the rest of us were outside protesting"*

*Ezekiel Philips agrees, though with qualifications. "This contemporary revision of Barry as some sort of revolutionary misses the fact that he critiqued both sides. He found this need for destruction... the void, the gap,*

*what have you.... a self-abnegating impulse.”*

*Harley Frampton, who was in the audience for the sparsely attended panel, has a different perspective. “It felt like two ex-lovers arguing. I don’t know if they ever physically consummated their relationship – but they almost didn’t need to. Because they had done it through their art. Roger was Barry’s best audience, the audience he was looking to cajole and provoke, and Barry was one of the few people on Earth who could really understand Roger.”*

*In his memoirs, Townstead’s description of the panel strikes a melancholy note:*

*“I thought it was another chance for us to spar, like we’d always done. Sure, I was mad at Roger for some of the things he said and did, yet I didn’t want to lose him. I just wanted him to translate the strange music coming from his head, so he could continue to give it to the world.*

*Unfortunately, Pope never did. A few days after the panel, which had made the front of The New York Times,<sup>1</sup> the artist boarded a plane for Eemmen, the Netherlands, where he was going to inspect the completion of his new ‘intervention,’ called WALDEN,<sup>2</sup> for the Sonsbeek Art Festival. As the plane approached Greenland however, it encountered unexpected turbulence from an ice storm, and crashed just off the coast, killing everyone on board.*

*“The last thing I said to Roger is the greatest regret of my life,” wrote Townstead:*

*“There’s been a lot of things said and written, good and bad, about Roger. Yet the one thing he wasn’t was a coward. It took great courage from him to go out into the world every day. It takes great courage for all of us. And Roger thought the best way to have a stable relationship with the world was to try and be in conversation with it, use its resources in our own individual ways. And I’d like to think this death was in some weird way a bit. I know this sounds self-regarding and narcissistic. But Roger used to sign the Earth with different materials, and when he ran out of materials to sign it with, he wound up signing it with himself. There’s something poetic and rock’n’roll about that.*

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1 The New York Times. “Sharp Words Between Artists at Whitney Panel” (September 6th, 1972)

2 See Grierson, Leopold. *STRANGE MONOLITHS: LAND AND ECO-ART OF THE 70’S AND 80’S*, University of Maryland Press, 2013, for photographic documentation of the incomplete intervention site, and its gradual decomposition over the past three decades.

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*Why this?*

The speed at which the sculpture is made is erased by its completion. Once the final contouring is finished all evidence of the process by which it got to this place, the artist's hand, is meaningless.

It ceases to be an extension of interior and becomes an object in space.

*Now?*

*In this place?*

Regardless of whether or not it is a 'monument,' its value or effect is neutral until the spectator encounters it. Then, and only then, can a different kind of photosynthesis take place.

*For whom?*

*Self or other?*

The object gets broken down into its individual elements (shape, size, color, form) and then further atomized until all parties, artist and spectator alike, return to the original, primeval question:

*Gift?*

*or prayer?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Last entry in Roger Pope's journal, dated September 6th, 1972. His then-partner Dom Morello states that Pope had forgotten his journal in a rush to get to the airport for his Eemen departure. Portions of the journal, including this specific section, were used in Barry Townstead's 2006 film *VANISHING POINT*, for which he won the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.